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New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 119

Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Acting President: In accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 70/7, of 4 November 2015, today we hold this commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

It is now my pleasure to read out a statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, who, unfortunately, is unable to be with us this afternoon.

"There are some things we wish we could forget. There are some pieces of humankind's past we may want to wish away, but we cannot. Today we acknowledge. Today we consider. Today we remember. The vicious and inhumane system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade remains a stain on the fabric of human history. Today, as we mark this International Day of Remembrance, we pause to reflect on what occurred, its impact on our present and how to ensure it is never repeated.

"Remembering slavery is not an abstract exercise. We know that more than 18 million women, men and children were victims of enslavement. They resisted, struggled and fought for freedom. They endured 400 years of exploitation and abuse. People like you and I were treated like chattel — bought, sold, traded, inherited and disposed of. Generations of leaders and ordinary citizens perpetuated, condoned or turned a blind eye to this.

"The philosopher Edmund Burke once said, 'Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.' The factors that give rise to entrenched slavery must be understood. We must watch for them. We must counter them when they appear.

"Discrimination, racism and xenophobia continue to plague our world. People are still stripped of their humanity and are exploited and abused for economic gain. Who can forget the images of men shackled together and being sold in an open market? I am not speaking of centuries past, but just months ago along the coast of Libya. Those incidents rightfully provoked outrage and immediate action. Countless more, no doubt, go undetected — passing through new doors of no return. Divisive and dehumanizing rhetoric is on the rise. Minorities and the vulnerable are targeted as the cause of problems. We must look at those warning signs and take corrective and preventive action. When we remember slavery, we must do so to learn its lessons and commit to not repeating the mistakes of the past.

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"We should also recognize slavery's nefarious impact on our present realities. Many challenges we now grapple with were reinforced by the horrific system of slavery. The solutions are therefore linked to addressing its legacies. We now speak of sustainable development and leaving no one behind. Therefore, we should bear in mind the social and economic inequalities entrenched through slavery. Addressing discrimination; countering imbalances in economic structures; balancing access to education, health care and decent work; guaranteeing access to justice — all resonate with the Sustainable Development Goals and would go a long way towards unravelling slavery's devastating impact on millions of people and their descendants.

"Lastly, we must ensure that we never again descend to that low point. We can do so by educating current and future generations about slavery and its impacts, but also by teaching about the struggles, the challenges and the victories. We have the tools to spread the message — whether through educational curriculums, in exhibits, in film or via social media. *The Ark of Return*, which was placed prominently outside this Hall, stands as a reminder of our collective commitment to do so.

"We cannot undo the past, but we can shape the future. Today we remember and honour those who suffered from slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We honour them by promoting tolerance, justice and human dignity. We honour them by combating racism, by ending human trafficking and by upholding the basic tenet that 'we are all born equal, in freedom and dignity'."

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the General Assembly today to remember and commemorate the victims and survivors of the transatlantic slave trade. Lasting for more than 400 years, the abominable buying and selling of human beings was the largest forced movement of people in history. It was inhumane and shameful. And yet it was legally sanctioned, conducted and condoned by leaders and countries in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere.

Eleven years ago, the General Assembly established the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to acknowledge the horrific trafficking in human lives. On this day we must also recognize the role played by many of our countries, including my own, Portugal, in robbing millions of people of their homes, families, dignity and lives and in profiting from their misery. However, this observance was established not only to acknowledge a dreadful chapter in human history but also to shine a spotlight on the dangers of racism and prejudice today.

Although the transatlantic slave trade was abolished in the 1800s, it continues to affect the social, cultural and political interaction among peoples and countries. The tragic mass human suffering must be recounted to younger generations through an education that provides an accurate reflection of historical accounts, including the many acts of bravery and resistance carried out by slaves. The United Nations Remember Slavery Programme and the UNESCO Slave Route project are among the initiatives that contribute to more inclusive societies through education and outreach.

It is equally important to highlight the enormous contributions of people of African descent across the world. We see those contributions everywhere, in every area of human endeavour and in every realm of human experience — from the sciences to the arts and from academia to sports, politics, law, civil rights and international affairs.

One descendant of slaves made history at the United Nations itself: Ralph Bunche, the first African-American to win a Nobel Prize. One of the most respected and celebrated international civil servants in the history of the Organization, he once said: "Hearts are the strongest when they beat in response to noble ideals." Our work today builds on his achievements.

Lewis Howard Latimer, the son of enslaved parents who escaped to freedom, is considered one of the greatest inventors of the United States, especially for his improvement of carbon filaments in light bulbs. Born in Saint Lucia, Sir William Arthur Lewis became the first person of African descent to win the Nobel Prize for economics. The contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr., to human and civil rights are of such global renown and eternal value that they need no description.

I commend to all present an exhibition currently on display in our Visitors' Lobby that highlights the work of contemporary architects of African descent in different parts of the world. One of the individuals featured is Elizabeth Kennedy, a descendant of slaves from Jamaica, who founded her own firm of landscape architects. Graciela Dixon is the first woman of African

descent to serve as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama, and we are delighted to host her here today.

The efforts of those people and of others give life to the theme of this year's observance — "Triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality" — which is inspired by the efforts of survivors and their descendants to establish better lives for themselves and more just societies for all. It was precisely to ensure freedom and equality for all that the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 70 years ago. Article 4 of the Declaration is emphatic:

> "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

Yet today we see modern manifestations of servitude and bondage, with millions of children among the victims. We also know the depth of the gaps that exist in the realization of the rights of people of African descent and the intensity of the racism and hatred that they encounter daily. In this International Decade for People of African Descent, we must recognize the work that is still to be done.

On this International Day of Remembrance, let us pledge to remain forever vigilant and to use this opportunity to lift up all lives and to fight against forced labour and other horrendous abuses that have no place in our world. Today we honour the memory of the victims and survivors of the transatlantic slave trade by continuing our common struggle to ensure that all people live in dignity and justice. I thank the Assembly for commemorating this day and for raising its voice for that noble cause.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, and as indicated in the letter from the President of the General Assembly dated 20 March 2017, I would like to consult members with a view to inviting The Honourable Graciela Dixon, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama, to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite The Honourable Graciela Dixon to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to The Honourable Graciela Dixon, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama.

Ms. Dixon: It is a great pleasure and a great honour for me to be here today to deliver the keynote address on the occasion of the commemoration of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As I went through my notes and did my obligatory research on this topic, a great deal of information regarding the struggles of the African people and of the people of African descent in this part of the world in particular was accessible, especially the more recent history of the struggles of African-American people during the second half of the previous century.

Interestingly, I came across a new dimension in my own thoughts, and my appreciation of the same historical facts changed. My perspective of the history that I studied in my early teens was expanded, and I suddenly understood how deeply the contents of the abundant material that I went through were connected to my own personal history.

As I reviewed the depth of the trauma suffered by the hundreds of millions of men and women dragged away from their homelands and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to be delivered as disposable merchandise under the merciless domain of ruthless people who sought the African human force as tools for the exploitation of their occupied lands in this hemisphere, I recalled many incidental chats that I once had with an old man who shared with me some memories of his childhood on the Caribbean island of Grenada. I then managed to rediscover my own existence.

I say that because, when reflecting on the struggles and triumphs of that old man, I see the struggles and triumphs of his grandmother, who was enslaved. I also see the struggles and triumphs of those who, like her, endured and survived despite the trauma and abuse that they suffered. While growing up in the Republic of Panama in a small city of only 16 streets and just a few avenues, at about the age of 16 I became infused with the spirit of the civil rights movement in the United States of America and supported its struggle. Because of some particularities of my own social environment, it was easy for me to adopt slogans such as "we are black and we are beautiful". I learned to love myself despite

the dominating standards, which were being imposed on black kids and which were leading to all sorts of restrictions, self-denial and the diminishing of our self-esteem. Although Colón, my city, was largely populated by black people, who were mostly immigrants like that old man — my grandfather — girls were forbidden from wearing their hair naturally, and young boys were forced to trim their hair down to the skull so as not to show their fluffy and very kinky hair. Others of my generation were also influenced by the North American civil rights movement at the same time that we began rebelling at school and expressing our disagreement with such rules.

In that context, for the first time my grandfather shared with me what it was like to grow up in a fishing village in a small Caribbean island. For him, there were only two options once he was no longer of school age: he could either take to the sea and become a fisherman, or he could take to the fields and work on a white man's farm. That was when my great-great-grandmother, who raised him, decided that Baba, as he was called, would have a different future. She got him a job at the printing shop as a cleaner, and there the miracle happened. His passion for words was set free. But the most important thing that he said to me was that his grandmother, who had been a slave, would frequently stand at her doorway and, as she hit her chest with the palm of her hand, she would shout in a loud and powerful voice: "No one can come hurt me because I am an Ibo woman and the daughter of an African king!"

That was the beginning of my learning process concerning my heritage and my grandfather. I must share with everyone that the most powerful lesson of all was the sense of pride and dignity acquired from knowing where we came from and who we are. With my grandfather, I began to understand the precious value of self-recognition, as well as our human, unbreakable capacity to survive all challenges — to survive and succeed. That is the lesson I have learned and nurtured all my life. It has become the power of my soul and the inspiration of my actions ever since. That is why, as I reflect upon the struggles and triumphs of the African people — of men and women like my great-great-grandmother — I cannot but humble myself in praise and recognition. For they struggled for their lives, and they succeeded. They survived. They struggled to retain the memories from home, and they succeeded. They struggled to preserve their souls, their fate and their culture, and they succeeded. They struggled to ensure their heritage, and here I am.

I am living testimony to the triumphs of my ancestors. I am living testimony to the resiliency of the black African woman who chose not to surrender, but to ensure the best possible options for her young grandchild. It is African heritage that paved the way to achieving what we are proud to carry today with our shining foreheads and smooth skins. It is because of such men and women that we can gather here today to mark our determination to never again in human history repeat the horrendous crime of slavery both for our people and every other human being on Earth.

That is why today we can render homage to men and women like W.E.B. Du Bois, Rosa Parks, William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Coretta Scott King, Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Anne Moody, Dorothy Height, Assata Shakur, Anne Braden, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, to mention just a few. Together with those extraordinary women and men, I should like to render personal homage to that old man — my grandfather — and that Ibo African woman — my great-great-grandmother — who taught me through him the value of life and the importance of grasping challenges as we go through life, because challenges can certainly change the course of one's personal history. Allow me to render homage to those two old folks responsible for the design of the woman standing before the Assembly today. Allow me to render homage to all of those old folks who taught us black women and men to look up at everyone and not be belittled or intimidated by their apparent differences — those old folks who taught us the value of finding ourselves and our future, and taught us to embrace our legitimate right to a proper education with courage and determination, to equal opportunities, to healthy living conditions, to preserve and expand our culture, to live in a peaceful world and to enjoy the pleasures of equality, justice and recognition.

We have earned all that for what have been our priceless contributions to the development of the entire world. We have the right to enjoy and live in a free world. We have the right to enjoy and live in a world where the full and final eradication of racism and discrimination in every form will no longer be just a wishful thought. We have that right just because we are humans. Although we continue to face new challenges,

the greatest of all is the mark on history left by our ancestors. If they survived the atrocious conditions of the transatlantic passage and overcame the hell-trap of slavery, and resisted and endured, despite discrimination and segregation, then we truly have no excuse. We shall focus on our goals of freedom and equality. We shall not lose our track. And we shall be consistent with the task already set forth to be accomplished in the International Decade for People of African Descent.

Let us expand our minds and release our dreams to shape them into present and achievable realities. Let us expand those dreams — the dreams of Martin Luther King, the dreams of Nelson Mandela. Let us keep that ball rolling. Let us just do it.

The Acting President: I thank Ms. Dixon for her inspiring briefing this afternoon.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Gambia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Tangara (Gambia): I am honoured, in my capacity as the Chair of the Group of African States for the month of March, to deliver this statement.

I wish to extend our gratitude to the Steering Committee — with membership drawn from the States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Union — to UNESCO and to the Department of Public Information for the planned activities and events for the Remember Slavery Programme.

Every year, around 25 March, we assemble to mark this day, established by resolution 62/122, in 2007, to honour the memory of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, one of the greatest tragedies in the history of humankind in terms of scale and duration, and to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and prejudice today. The theme for this year, "Remember slavery: triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality", is more relevant than ever before. Just three years ago, on 25 March 2015, the United Nations unveiled a permanent memorial, located in the United Nations Visitors Plaza in New York. *The Ark of Return*, created by Haitian-American architect Rodney Leon, stands as a reminder of the legacy of the slave trade and the importance of recognizing the contributions of people of African descent.

It is evident that the African continent is the birthplace of humankind and the cradle of civilization. It was home to Kemet, ancient Egypt over 5000 years ago. There was another ancient Kingdom called Ta-Seti in what is known as Nubia in the Sudan. Historians say that this may have been the earliest State. The very first scientific developments are associated with Egypt. Engineering, mathematics, architecture, medicine, State formation and governance can be credited to the African continent. Kingdoms such as Mali, Ethiopia, Great Zimbabwe, Kush and Axum all flourished in the early 1500s B.C.E.

Let us ponder for a moment what this year's theme means. What were the triumphs and struggles all about? It was a struggle for fundamental human rights, not to be the property of any person, and for the total liberation from all forms of enslavement and domination.

The heroes who triumphed are numerous — Queen Nanny, from Jamaica; Toussaint Louverture; Henry "Box" Brown; Robert Smalls, a slave and civil war hero; Quilombo dos Palmares, from Brazil; Harriet Tubman; and others, not to mention the unnamed enslaved African people who built prominent buildings and monuments, including the White House in Washington, D.C.

I also mention Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey Jr. and Malcom X, who not only fought for civil rights, but human rights in the United States, and joined hands with the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity to fight for the attainment of independence from the colonial masters in Africa. I also recall the then independent States' leaders — Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, William Tubman of Liberia and others — inspired by the vision of liberation, established the Organization of African Unity on 25 May 1963.

The founding fathers of Africa helped blaze the way to political freedom and equality across the continent. With the support of brothers and sisters of African descent globally and from civil-rights movements in the United States, the freedom fighters on the continent were more determined than ever to fight for the right of their peoples to self-determination in Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

In 1994, Nelson Mandela, an icon of struggle and success, ushered in an unprecedented event: the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa, bringing an end to the struggle for equality. To bring those memories close to home, 22 March 2018 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in South Angola, which put an end to the myth of invincibility

of the South African apartheid army. Some of the survivors of that battle live today to tell their stories, and a monument has been erected in their honour.

The triumphs are numerous and continue to be manifest. Recently, civil rights pioneer Viola Desmond became the first Black Canadian woman to grace the Canadian $10 bill for her defiant act not to give up her seat in her fight for equality.

This year there is a project under way through the Mayor of Prichard, Alabama, United States, in conjunction with the Alliance Institute organization to establish an Africatown that will explore the effects of slavery and memorialize the lives of the Africatown residents as an underpinning for further cultural and economic exchange between the Gulf Coast states and African nations. Here again are narratives of success and linkages that keep triumphs alive.

Knowledge transfer was key during slavery, particularly in the area of agriculture, where the enslaved population from West Africa, who brought traditional farming knowledge and practices with them, were able to transmit and share that information with slave owners and contribute to productive farming activities in the wetlands and lowlands of South Carolina.

(*spoke in French*)

We must fight against institutional amnesia with regard to slavery. We owe it to the memory of its victims. It is a duty to reflect upon and question our beliefs, practices and attitudes as human beings. What connects the fighters I mentioned is their thirst for freedom. It brings to mind Emiliano Zapata, who said,

(*spoke in Spanish*)

> "It is better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees."

(*spoke in English*)

As we honour all those who through their struggles and triumphs, victories and pain, brought about changes and revolutionized society, we stand strong against all forms of slavery, racism and discrimination today. As we acknowledge the tragedy of slavery, we remember its legacy, engrave the triumphs over the struggles in our hearts and celebrate the heritage of the people of African descent each day. Lest we forget.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 54 States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States as Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for having convened this plenary meeting to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and Transatlantic Slave Trade, in accordance with resolution 70/7, of 4 November 2015. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his very inspiring opening statement. We also express our appreciation to Ms. Graciela Dixon, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama, for her enlightening and informative keynote statement.

On this occasion, we would like to note the many initiatives that have been undertaken to reaffirm our commitment to implement the Durban Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which are aimed at honouring the memory of the victims of slavery and the slave trade and at restoring their dignity.

We commemorate this year's International Day under the theme "Triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality", which gives us an opportunity not just to remember and pay tribute to the victims of slavery, but to contemplate and learn from the lessons of the past. It represents an opportunity to call for action to oppose and fight any form of slavery in the world today.

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history, and, as we remember those who suffered and died as a result of this scourge, we have the responsibility to raise awareness and educate future generations about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice and encourage continued action in this regard.

We would like to emphasize the importance of making sure that while we commemorate this international day actions are also being taken on the ground to develop and implement educational programmes through school curriculums, in accordance with national legislations, in order to educate future

generations on understanding of the lessons, history and consequences of slavery and the slave trade.

We would like to commend the efforts made by the Permanent Memorial Committee, the Group of African States and the Caribbean Community, in collaboration with UNESCO, to fulfil the General Assembly resolution on the creation of the permanent memorial, *The Ark of Return*, to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, in acknowledgement of the tragedy.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group of States, I would like to reiterate our commitment to honour the legacy of the victims of slavery and transatlantic slave trade and to fight all forms and manifestations of slavery.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Rybakov (Belarus): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade constitute the gravest violation of human rights. Due to its duration, scale and legality, the transatlantic slave trade represents an abhorrent phenomenon in the history of humankind. *The Ark of Return*, erected on the premises of United Nations Headquarters, is a silent reminder for all of us of this atrocious practice. At the same time, it prompts us to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, while considering the legacy of those practices. Although the issue of the transatlantic slave trade forms a sizeable part of world history, little is known about, on the one hand, its long-term consequences for affected communities, and, on the other, the important socioeconomic contributions that slaves made in the enslaving countries.

We believe that such gaps in history should be filled by academic research, activities at the local level and by raising awareness of the slavery-associated drivers, enablers and by-products, such as racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Today the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade belongs to the triumphs of history. It is an integral component of the path to human rights, democracy and free societies.

But, unfortunately, slavery as such does not belong to history. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), nearly 21 million people are enslaved, while other estimates are as high as 35 million. The ILO estimates that the profits generated by forced labour amount to $150 billion annually.

After the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, the phenomenon re-emerged in the form of trafficking in persons. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, about 53 per cent of the victims of trafficking detected today had been subjected to sexual exploitation, and about 40 per cent to forced labour. Most of the victims are treated and moved around like goods on the global market. Today there is no national legal framework that would recognize the trade in human beings.

Yet a great deal remains to be done to ensure that no one becomes a commodity in the hands of others. In that regard, we need to redouble our efforts to fully and effectively implement the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto and other relevant United Nations documents, such as the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, so as to ensure the fundamental freedoms of human beings worldwide and to protect victims of human trafficking.

We also welcome the designation of 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the initiatives undertaken by Member States in reaffirming their commitments to implement the Durban Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, inter alia, aimed at countering the legacy of slavery and contributing to restoring the dignity of the victims of slavery and the slave trade.

Many years ago the famed nineteenth-century African-American writer, social reformer, politician and abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, "Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave". That quote is still topical today. It is ever more important to spread knowledge and to build a world together, on the basis of international law, where every human being can enjoy his or her dignity and live a life free from slavery, fear and humiliation.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Rosselli Frieri (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC).

At the outset, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, for having convened this commemorative plenary meeting. I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama, Ms. Graciela Dixon, for their statements.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is one of the most important anniversaries set by the General Assembly. It is the pinnacle of a series of events and activities that draw attention to the issue of slavery. The transatlantic slave trade was one of the worst violations of human rights in history. This dehumanizing enterprise undermined the very foundation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This should therefore be a day to honour all who died and suffered as a result of slavery and to consider the long-term causes, consequences and impact of slavery in order to ensure that this heinous practice never rears its head again.

Less than a week ago in this Hall, the members of GRULAC declared that any doctrine of racial superiority was scientifically false, morally reproachable, socially unjust and dangerous and should be categorically rejected, along with any theory that seeks to establish the existence of separate human races. Today, we recall a scourge that lasted more than four centuries, the victims of which were African men, women and children. That practice was legitimized by an anti-black ideology and by legislation set by cities.

That is why it is timely to reflect today on how we got here. We must remember the victims and honour their sacrifice, but this is also a time to address the legacy of that dark and abominable period of human history and to remind the international community of its moral obligation to contribute to redressing the crimes committed. In fact, from 1501 to 1830, the largest forced migration — and one of the most inhumane in recorded human history — was carried out through the transatlantic slave trade. Those who survived this shameful horror were unloaded in ports of Latin America and the Caribbean and forced to live a life of forced labour and endure systematic cruelty.

The wealth and earnings of many countries were built upon the hard work and abuse of that involuntary African labour system. Its practice and cost undoubtedly constitute a crime against humanity that must never be forgotten or allowed to recur. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the enduring effects of slavery have had an indelible impact on our societies. On the one hand, we have diverse ethnicities and cultures, which constitute invaluable human capital. On the other hand, we have deep-rooted social stratification, most of which originates in the colonial era — a period of mass exploitation. Nevertheless, the Latin America and the Caribbean States are committed to establishing a society of equals in which the prospects and achievements of individuals are not predetermined by the colour of their skin or their ethnic origin. We seek to create entirely inclusive and peaceful societies from which all can benefit from and that contribute to our progress.

The States members of GRULAC have committed to turning the sacrifice of the myriad victims of slavery into opportunities that could transform the realities of their descendants that live in our region and providing the diversity that strengthens our societies. Our regional action plan for people of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted in Brasilia in 2014, as well as the special declaration emanating from the third Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Belén, Costa Rica, in 2015, guide our efforts to fully integrate people of African descent and to ensure that development goals at the national and regional levels are wholly inclusive. The Group is particularly enthralled by the permanent monument to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, erected outside these walls. It is a significant achievement that ensures that we will never forget.

In conclusion, the States members of GRULAC join the international community in commemorating this important day highlighting the struggle and recognizes the achievements of those who have been emancipated from the curse of slavery. It is indeed a day of celebration, but it is also a day to take stock and consolidate our determination to tackle the current challenges of inequality, intolerance, discrimination, poverty, colonialism, modern slavery and prejudice. Today, the States members of GRULAC can assure the international community that while some may opt to

look away, close their eyes and clap their hands over their ears, they cannot claim that they did not know about the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mrs. Furman (Israel): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Three years ago, Member States assembled outside this building to unveil *The Ark of Return*, a monument built to commemorate the victims of the transatlantic slave trade and to fight against racism and prejudice today. For nearly four centuries, millions of men, women and children were victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Generation after generation suffered under the most barbaric circumstances imaginable.

The Group of Western European and other States encourages the important work of the Remember Slavery Programme through the Education Outreach Section of the Department of Public Information. The theme of this year's commemoration, "Triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality," speaks to past accomplishments and to the work ahead. We honour and remember the heroic actions of the slaves, abolitionists and unsung heroes who acted in the face of grave danger and adversity. Their bravery contributed to generations of individuals who fought for freedom and equality.

This day is also about celebrating the legacy and contributions of people of African descent. In order to move forward from the past, we must have frank conversations about the history of this harmful past, honour the sacrifices others have made to move forward toward equality, and stand together to protect the rights of all.

Despite the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, millions worldwide still fall victim to slavery or practices similar to slavery and too many must continue to fight against hatred and abuse. That is why we, as the representatives of Member States and, more importantly, as individuals, pledge to speak out against injustices. That is why it is important that we discuss those issues today. We owe it to the nameless millions in the past who had no one to speak for them. We also owe it to future generations who depend on us to set a new standard of responsibility. Our progress every day will be the greatest tribute we pay to those who risk their lives for freedom.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): We gather today to commemorate a shameful and brutal period in the world's history. We remember the more than 10 million men, women and children who lost their lives and their dignity at the hands of the transatlantic slave trade. The rare messages of hope that come from that terrible time are the stories of the courageous men and women who fought for and won their God-given right to freedom. Some of them made the ultimate sacrifice dying in slavery so that others might live in freedom.

We cannot change that painful part of our history but we can learn from it by remembering those remarkable people. We remember Elizabeth Freeman, an African-American slave who was the first to sue for her freedom and win in a Massachusetts court in 1780. She was inspired to fight for her freedom by listening to the wealthy family she served discuss the Bill of Rights. In describing her time in captivity, Elizabeth said:

> "If one minute's freedom had been offered to me and I had been told I must die at the end of that one minute, I would have taken it just to stand one minute on God's Earth as a free woman."

Two hundred years later Elizabeth's pain still stings for anyone who believes in the inalienable right to freedom. Elizabeth won her liberty but most slaves had to wait 83 years for President Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. And even then, the journey to full participation in the American dream for African-Americans was far from over. It was not until the 1960s, in the not-too-distant past, that the descendants of slaves were granted equality before the law, and that struggle continues. In Elizabeth's words and her example, we find the inspiration for all of us to protect the hard-won gains of liberty and to continue our work to extinguish hate and discrimination.

Next week we will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 1963, when Dr. King was jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, he wrote about the struggle for civil rights that he was leading in my country. Even from his jail cell, he wrote:

> "If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands."

He was right.

The progress we have achieved since Dr. King wrote those words has been especially important to me as the former Governor of South Carolina. My state's troubled history with slavery and discrimination is well known, and its lessons live on. Anyone who knows the South Carolina of today knows how much progress has been made as we use those lessons to move forward as a people. While we are proud of what we have achieved, we do not forget the long and challenging road that got us here.

That is why the United States helped fund the permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. That is why the International Decade for People of African Descent is so important. They remind us of the work we must do to defeat slavery and inequality and to eradicate discrimination in all forms. They give us role models, like Elizabeth Freeman, to guide our efforts. Elizabeth Freeman died a free woman in 1829. I am told her tombstone still exists in an old cemetery in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. It reads, in part:

> "She was born a slave and remained a slave for nearly thirty years. She could neither read nor write yet in her own sphere she had no superior or equal."

May we go forward to build a freer and more inclusive world, informed by the lessons of history and inspired by the example of extraordinary people like Elizabeth Freeman.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana): First and foremost, I wish to commend the President and the Secretariat for convening today's important event in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Gambia on behalf of the Group of African States. We would like to make the following remarks on behalf of Ghana.

We thank Ms. Graciela Dixon, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama, for her inspiring statement. The theme for this year's commemoration, "Triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality", suggests that our observance of the Day must go beyond the mere remembrance of the victims to foster dialogue on addressing the contemporary forms of slavery and renew our commitment to action.

The dehumanizing slave trade, spanning nearly 400 years, resulted in the forced displacement of nearly 12.5 million Africans from the continent, across the Atlantic to the Americas and the Caribbean. While that heinous crime against humanity wreaked devastating consequences for the continent of Africa, we also acknowledge the fact that the victims of slavery and their descendants, through their stories of resilience and survival, inspired movements for change around the world, in particular for Africa's decolonization and the pan-Africanist movement.

The influence and immense contribution of slaves and their descendants in the development of the Americas and the Caribbean must be acknowledged and celebrated. In spite of its horrendous nature, the slave trade resulted in the transformation of the world through the shaping of new cultures. Research has shown that the transfer of the technical and scientific knowledge and skills that went with it, together with African spirituality and cultures, have all had a positive impact on modern-day societies across the globe.

The irrepressible spirit that led to slave rebellions on the islands of Haiti, Jamaica and many others ultimately inspired the movement to abolish slavery and fuelled decolonization in Africa. The influence of renowned pan-Africanists such as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B Dubois, among others, contributed to Africa's struggle for freedom, equality and justice.

The remnants of the slave trade in Ghana are still visible today in the approximately 40 slave forts and castles dotting Ghana's coastline, three of which have been designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. *The Ark of Return*, located in the visitor's plaza of the United Nations in New York, is a permanent memorial to the victims of the slave trade and will, for years to come, remind us of that dark period in history. But more importantly, the *Ark* also carries a message of hope when juxtaposed with The Door of No Return located at Elmina Castle in Ghana, from where thousands of slaves were shipped. Through special events and initiatives, such as the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival, popularly known as PANAFEST, held

annually since the mid-1980s, Ghana has sought ways to bring Africans on the continent and in the diaspora together around the issues raised by slavery, which remain suppressed.

Faced with daily reminders of the persistence of contemporary forms of slavery, we must commit to meaningful dialogue on this subject. We are of the view that, while greater commitment to existing international conventions will be crucial, our collective efforts to promote respect for the human rights, fundamental freedoms and dignity of all persons regardless of their race, colour, gender and religion, will be enhanced through continuing dialogue and better appreciation of cultural similarities, as well as differences.

More than 40 million people around the world in virtually every country remain trapped in modern-day slavery in the forms of forced labour, forced prostitution, human trafficking, child labour and forced marriages, with women accounting for 71 per cent of its victims. Failings in the migration system, particularly in fragile States and regions in conflict and crisis, have given rise to horrible stories of slavery-like practices that must be urgently addressed. Member States must commit to upholding the human dignity of all peoples and stamping out prejudice, racism and xenophobia in all their forms and manifestations. That is the only way in which we can ensure that never again will the world be confronted with the atrocity of the slave trade.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to commend the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for having convened this meeting to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

I align myself with the statement delivered by Ambassador Mamadou Tangara of the Gambia in his capacity as Chair of the Group of African States for the month of March.

It is a distinct honour for me to speak on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on this memorable occasion, on which we commemorate the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. When the fifteenth-century Portuguese explorer Fernando Po came to the island of Bioko, he was so amazed by the natural splendour of its surrounding bays to the north that he referred to it by two Portuguese words for "beautiful" — *formosa* and *bella*. When the English explorer Henry Morton Stanley arrived on that same island in 1884, he used the word "extraordinary" to describe Bioko's natural beauty. In Stanley's view, the island was the pearl of the Gulf of Guinea.

In addition to its natural beauty, it should be noted that during the period from 1471 to 1474, Equatorial Guinea was then being explored and exploited by the Portuguese, who appropriated vast areas of the Gulf of Guinea. The islands of Bioko and Annobon were in fact important ports of call for the slave trade. Black pearls — human pearls — were captured and exported to France, Spain and England prior to being sent to the Americas. For some, the volcanic peaks, the lush greenery of our tropical forests, our luxuriant landscapes and the black sand of Bioko might perhaps evoke the image of a tropical paradise, but for decades our people were subjected to the vilest exploitation of humankind by other humans. The slave trade — a grave human rights violation — became a large-scale, multinational operation. Certain practices of the black slave trade were even legalized in some countries. That same trade also contributed to the economic growth of the West. While under the control of Great Britain, the island of Fernando Po financed in part the United Kingdom's industrial revolution.

The truth is that the transatlantic slave trade caused incalculable suffering. Every one of the millions of individual victims had their personal story, family, dreams and hopes. Africans were treated as inferior beings. Trafficking was at the heart of deep structural inequalities at the economic and social levels. Those injustices and inequalities continue to affect people of African descent throughout the world. Member States must pursue their efforts in that regard. Accordingly, Equatorial Guinea welcomed the initiative taken by the Caribbean Community to erect a permanent memorial — *The Ark of Return* — to the creation of which Equatorial Guinea contributed $100,000.

Those who succumbed under the yoke of slavery had little in the way of refuge. They had their beliefs, drums and invincible will not to die. They ran the risk of losing their identity and their reason for living. Equatorial Guinea and its people, Government and Head of State, His Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, will always be proud to have contributed to creating that monument. By honouring with others the victims of slavery, we participated in restoring the dignity of those who had been dispossessed of everything. Heretofore, such a permanent memorial

at Headquarters will represent not only a powerful symbol for the education of future generations, but also an unequivocal reminder to all those who would prefer to forget. Equatorial Guinea is fully and unwaveringly committed to the duty to remember.

Our country pays tribute to the courage of those who succumbed under the yoke of slavery, and we celebrate their boldness. We celebrate Toussaint Louverture, Aimé Césaire, the Maroons and the brave fighters of Jamaica, Haiti, Peru and the entire African diaspora who rose up against humiliation — as the great Aimé Césaire depicted in his epic poem, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* — and who fought as embodied in the figure of the Haitian woman, the symbol of our pride. We celebrate the memory of those who fought against such a terrible crime, grave intolerance and base injustice. We celebrate those who, through their creativity, contribute to the struggle, and we once again celebrate architect Rodney Leon, the artist who deftly created this historic masterpiece.

Equatorial Guinea takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to the United Nations for its work in combating slavery, without entering into a detailed analysis or assessment of what the international community has accomplished or failed to accomplish in that regard over the past several years.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is very concerned about the instances of slavery and xenophobia that continue to arise in various areas of the globe, in particular the shocking cases in North Africa — for example in Libya — perpetrated by non-State actors. We believe that global peace and security cannot be fully achieved while slavery, xenophobia and racism persist. That is why we invite Governments to take greater steps to raise awareness of the dangers of such ills by implementing institutional reforms that would strengthen the behaviours and values of modern States in the minds of their people. The aim would be to reject persistent social discrimination of all kinds.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, I would like to point out that we are all part of the same large family — humankind. Whether from the Caribbean, Africa or other regions of the world, every year as we commemorate the abolition of slavery, we all declare "Never again".

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Uruguay on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

We attach particular importance to the annual commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade — a particularly sensitive issue for the Cuban people. We supported resolutions 61/19 and 70/7 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, designate 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and establish a permanent memorial in remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. More than 200 years have passed since the struggle for independence that began in the former American colonies ended slavery. Nonetheless, it would be an unforgivable historical mistake to disregard or claim to forget the past.

With the introduction of the slave trade into the Western hemisphere, the former colonial Powers committed a crime against humanity that is not time-bound. We must not forget the terrible fate of the millions of men, women and children who, for more than four centuries, were uprooted from their homelands in Africa and forcibly transported to the Americas. Those who benefited from the conquest, colonization, slavery and the slave trade must assume their responsibility and make reparations for the horrendous crimes they committed. It is crucial to comply with the provisions of the Durban Declaration, in particular with paragraphs 98 to 102, and of its Programme of Action, concerning the teaching and understanding of the truth about the tragedy, restoring dignity to the victims and providing reparation and compensation for the human damage caused.

We are increasingly concerned about the fact that slavery is not a phenomenon of the past. Almost 40 million people are subjected to similar conditions in the twenty-first century. It is painful to acknowledge that, as the International Labour Organization and other international agencies have warned, the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 8.7, will not be achieved unless efforts to eliminate modern slavery are drastically strengthened. Millions of women, men and children have become the victims of slavery and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. That is why we reiterate our call on the international community to adopt urgent measures to end contemporary forms of

slavery and other similar practices that constitute gross violations of human rights.

The theme of today's meeting — "Triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality" — recalls that this year marks the 227th anniversary of the beginning of the first victorious social revolution in Latin America and the Caribbean — the Haitian Revolution. Its main purpose was to end the egregious practice of slavery. The movement gained momentum in the other colonial territories of our America by incorporating the abolition of that inhumane practice into their aspirations for independence. That was also true in Cuba, where approximately 1.3 million Africans arrived as slaves. They and their descendants were key actors in the various stages of our struggle for freedom and contributed significantly to our nationality and culture. We inherited our fighting spirit and love for freedom from them.

Let today's commemoration encourage us not to forget the history and legacy of those who fought for our freedom and to remind the international community of its moral obligation to redress the crimes committed.

Mr. De Souza Monteiro (Brazil): We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Uruguay on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

We will now speak in our national capacity. The remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade is a unique opportunity for a reflection on the present-day situation of people of African descent. Despite the many decades since the abolition of slavery, the discrimination and inequalities resulting from it remain very present. Disaggregated data shows that today, higher levels of poverty, social exclusion and violence affect people of African descent at disproportionally high levels.

The contribution of slaves and their descendants to the political, economic, social, cultural, religious and intellectual history of Brazil is remarkable. Having the world's largest population of African descent, our country is fully aware of its share of the responsibility in addressing the past and redressing injustice.

Since the 1988 Constitution, the Brazilian Government has evolved its understanding and policies regarding people of African descent. First, it recognized the right to land tenure and ownership for runaway slave communities, known as quilombos, in particular the Quilombo dos Palmares, which is a symbol of resistance that lasted almost 100 years. The Constitution also recognized the importance of acknowledging and protecting Afro-Brazilian culture. The recognition of capoeira as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO is an indirect result of that change in mindset.

For the past 15 years, the Federal Government has worked with a special secretariat for the promotion of racial equality with the mandate of elaborating and implementing programmes aimed at improving the welfare and increasing the inclusiveness of ethnic communities, in particular those including African descendants. In the educational area, public financing programmes and quota systems have allowed a significant increase in the number of students of African descent in universities across the country. The biggest social protection programme in Brazil, the Programa Bolsa Familia, has benefited one of the most marginalized social stratum in the country — women of African descent. Although much progress has been made since the 1988 Constitution, undoubtedly much remains to be done. The Brazilian Government remains committed to overcoming the lingering effects of the transatlantic slave trade, both with general social protection policies and with specific and targeted affirmative actions.

Brazil has decided to join the Group of Friends of the Elimination of Racism, created last week under the leadership of South Africa and Belgium. We believe that that is a fundamental step forward. The United Nations system and Member States should be doing more to address the many challenges posed by the International Decade for People of African Descent, such as the negotiation of the international declaration of the rights of people of African descent and the establishment of the permanent forum on people of African descent. Too often, the issue of the rights of people of African descent is described as the priority of a single region. We would like to take this opportunity to underscore the importance of the engagement of every single country in the issue. It is true that the absolute numbers of people of African descent vary significantly across the globe. What seems to be unfortunately common, on the other hand, is the fact that black people suffer very similar trends of discrimination, which is undoubtedly a by-product of slavery. That statement is valid not only in the Americas, but also in other regions in the world.

Unfortunately, we are also witnessing concerning trends regarding multiple and intersecting forms with discrimination. Often, people of African descent suffer additional discrimination related to Islamophobia and xenophobia. The issue of the International Decade for People of African Descent is therefore not a priority of any one particular region. It should be considered by all countries as a unique opportunity to combat racial discrimination and address the socioeconomic by-products of the transatlantic slave trade.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Brazil's appreciation for the leadership of the Caribbean Community and others in erecting the permanent memorial of the slave trade — *The Ark of Return* — a daily reminder that inspires all representatives and visitors who enter the General Assembly building in New York City.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. The Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 119?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: I now call the attention of the General Assembly to draft decision A/72/L.44, circulated under sub-item (cc) of agenda item 99, entitled "Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament".

Members will recall that the Assembly concluded consideration of agenda item 99 as a whole at its 76th plenary meeting, on 24 December 2017. In order for the Assembly to take action on the draft decision, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of the sub-item.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (cc) of agenda item 99?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 99 (*continued*)

General and complete disarmament

(cc) Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament

Draft decision (A/72/L.44)

The Acting President: Members will further recall that at its second plenary meeting, on 15 September 2017, the General Assembly decided to allocate sub-item (cc) of agenda item 99 to the First Committee. To enable the General Assembly to take action expeditiously on the document, may I take it that the Assembly wishes to consider sub-item (cc) of agenda item 99 directly in plenary meeting and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to introduce draft decision A/72/L.44.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to briefly introduce draft decision A/72/L.44.

As we are all aware, on 24 December 2017 the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/251, by which it decided to organize a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament from 14 to 16 May, the purpose of which will be to assess progress made in the area of nuclear disarmament as a follow-up to the General Assembly high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament held in 2013. Resolution 72/251 also envisages a one-day series of meetings for the organization of such an international conference, to be held on 28 March.

Based on consultations held among several States Members of the Organization, including the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries — the primary proponents of resolution 72/251 and of convening the aforementioned international conference — it was decided to submit to the General Assembly for its consideration draft decision A/72/L.44, which would postpone the organizational meeting until 10 May. We believe that such a delay is necessary in order to provide Member States with sufficient time to carefully prepare all the details for the eventual organizational meeting so as to ensure the successful and constructive outcome

of this important international conference on nuclear disarmament, as well as greater participation at the highest possible level.

In that regard, with the hope that it can count on the support of all States Members of the Organization for the adoption of the draft decision, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its principled position on nuclear disarmament, which, together with the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects, continues to be its highest priority.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft decision A/72/L.44, entitled "Organizational meeting of the United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament". May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt it?

Draft decision A/72/L.44 was adopted (decision 72/553).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (cc) of agenda item 99.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.